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Smith. The war and its cost - 1848

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SPEECH

OF

MR. CALEB B. SMITH, OF INDIANA,

ON

THE WAR AND ITS COST.

**DELIVERED IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE U. STATES,
FEBRUARY 3, 1848.**

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SPEECH.

MR. CALEB B. SMITH, of Indiana, being entitled to the floor, on the question of referring the various parts of the President's Message to the several standing committees, addressed the House as follows:

MR. SPEAKER:

I shall not consume any portion of my time in discussing the origin of the war with Mexico. That question has been very ably and thoroughly discussed, not only at this session, but during the last Congress. The members of this House, and the country, are in possession of all the information necessary to enable them to form conclusions satisfactory to themselves. I have only to say, in regard to this matter, that this House has decided, during the present session, upon a solemn and deliberate vote by yeas and nays, that the war with the Republic of Mexico, in which we are now engaged, was "*unnecessarily and unconstitutionally commenced by the President of the United States.*" I had the good fortune—and I deem it extreme good fortune—to have the opportunity of recording my vote in favor of this sentence of condemnation. In giving that vote, my heart concurred with my judgment; and I desire to say no more at this time, in regard to the origin of the war, than to express my concurrence with the decision so solemnly made by this House. It is a decision which, in my deliberate judgment, the country will sustain and approve. Whatever may be the opinions of individuals who, influenced by partisan feelings, may be disposed to justify all that the President has done or may do, when party excitement shall have been dissipated by time, and the impartial pen of history shall have recorded the facts, the matured judgment of the American people will sanction that vote of condemnation.

But I desire at this time to speak more particularly in reference to questions of more practical utility—questions which concern the future rather than the past. However this war may have commenced, on whomsoever shall rest the responsibility of its origin, we are in the midst of it; its evils are now pressing upon us, paralyzing the energies of the country, drying up its resources, and wasting its best blood. It becomes us, the representatives of the American people, sent here to deliberate upon questions affecting their interests, calmly and dispassionately to deliberate, and consider whether some means may not be devised, by which this war may be terminated, and its calamitous consequences arrested.

The financial affairs of the country are at all times interesting, and demand our attention. They become doubly so in time of war, when our expenditures are greatly increased without any corresponding increase of revenue. Gentlemen on the other side of the House sometimes charge those who oppose the Administration with being in favor of the accumulation of a national debt. If there are any who desire the increase of our public debt, they are likely to be gratified to the fullest extent of their wishes. I shall take care to show that such a charge can have no application to me. I regard the accumulation of a national debt as an evil of the most serious magnitude, and one which every consideration of duty and patriotism requires us as far as possible to avert.

The effect of the Mexican war upon our financial condition, and the rapid augmentation of our public debt which it is likely to produce, have not, in my opinion, received the attention their importance merits. We have now upon our tables a bill which proposes to add eighteen and a half millions of dollars to our public debt, and which the honorable Chairman of the Committee of Ways

and Means has given us notice he intends to call up in a few days. The amount of the public debt at the commencement of the present session of Congress, as we were informed by the President and the Secretary of the Treasury, was \$45,659,659.40. To what amount is it to be increased? The President has already recommended loans to the amount of thirty-nine millions, viz., eighteen and a half millions for the residue of the present fiscal year, and twenty and a half millions for the next year. This additional amount of loans we are told will be necessary to prosecute the war until the close of the next fiscal year, ending on the 30th June, 1849. Thus we have in prospective, on the 30th June, 1849, according to the estimates of the President and his Cabinet, a public debt amounting to the sum of \$84,659,659.40. This looks like an amount of debt which should cause the people to reflect, even if confidence could be placed in the estimates of the Executive departments that it would be no more. But an examination of those estimates must satisfy every one who will examine them that they are wide of the mark. Ever since the commencement of the war, the country has been deceived by false estimates—false estimates of the amount of loans necessary, false estimates of the receipts of the Government, and false estimates of its expenditures. The official reports now before us prove the estimates heretofore made to be false; how, then, can those now presented command our confidence? At the commencement of the last session of Congress, the President, in his annual message, speaking of the loan necessary for the prosecution of the war, said:

"If the war should be continued until the thirtieth of June, 1848, being the end of the next fiscal year, it is estimated that an additional loan of twenty-three millions of dollars will be required. This estimate is made upon the assumption that it will be necessary to retain constantly in the Treasury four millions of dollars to guard against contingencies. If such surplus were not required to be retained, then a loan of nineteen millions of dollars would be sufficient."

The country was thus assured that a loan of twenty-three millions would be all the Government would require to enable it to prosecute the war until the 30th June, 1848, and still retain four millions in the Treasury as a constant surplus. Well, sir, Congress authorized the loan asked for—the twenty-three millions, besides five millions authorized by a previous act, have all been obtained; and yet, at the commencement of the present session of Congress, the President asks for an additional loan of eighteen and a half millions to enable him to prosecute the war to the end of the present fiscal year, 30th June, 1848. I present here a short extract from his message:

"Retaining a sufficient surplus in the Treasury, the loan required for the remainder of the present fiscal year (ending 30th June, 1848) will be about eighteen million five hundred thousand dollars."

The Secretary of the Treasury, in his report, informs us that it is expected to retain in the Treasury only three millions, instead of four, as stated in the report of last year. Then, if we add to the eighteen and a half millions asked for, the million taken from the surplus estimated to be in the Treasury, it appears that the estimate of loans of the last session fell short of the amount required, nineteen and a half millions of dollars. I should be much pleased if some friend of the Administration would inform us how this gross blunder has been made. Are we to attribute it to the errors of the Secretary of the Treasury? Is his judgment, in regard to the finances of the country, so poor that he is liable to fall into such glaring errors? Or has there been an attempt to cover up and conceal from the country the enormous expenses of the war, and the alarming national debt it is creating? I care not which horn of the dilemma the Administration and its friends may choose; in either case it is conclusively shown that no confidence can be placed in the estimates emanating from that source.

But the estimates now made by the Treasury Department show, that the public debt on the 30th of June, 1849, will amount to over eighty-four millions of

dollars. The estimate is made on the assumption that the Government will receive all the revenue estimated in the Secretary's report, and will be required to expend only the amount there estimated. But it will be seen, on examination, that these estimates of receipts and expenditures are entitled to as little credit as the estimate of loans, made last year. Let us look at the estimates of receipts and expenditures for the last year, and compare them with the amounts, as shown by the reports. The Secretary, in his annual report, in December, 1846, estimated the receipts for the year ending 30th June, 1847, at \$31,335,731.00. The actual receipts, as shown by the official report, were \$26,346,790.37, showing a deficiency of \$4,988,940.63—almost five millions. He estimated the expenditures for the same year at \$55,241,212.09, while the report shows that the actual expenditures were \$59,451,177.65—showing an excess, beyond the estimates, of \$4,209,965.56. The report now before us proves that the Secretary's estimates for the last year varied so far from the true amount of receipts and expenditures, as to make a difference of \$9,198,906.19. Is it not fair to presume that the estimates for the present and the ensuing year are at least as erroneous as were those for the last year? A careful examination of them will, in my opinion, show them to be erroneous to a much larger amount. But assuming them to be erroneous only to the same extent, then there will be an additional deficiency of means, to the amount of \$18,397,812.38, which must be provided for by additional loans, and which will swell the public debt, on the 30th June, 1849, to the sum of \$103,057,471.75—one hundred and three millions of dollars—a sum greatly beyond the entire public debt occasioned by the late war with Great Britain. That our public debt will reach that sum at that time there cannot be a doubt, while there is every reason to believe that it will be many millions beyond it. The estimates and recommendations of the Executive are clearly shown to be entitled to no credit. At the commencement of the session, the President and the Secretary of the Treasury both stated that a loan of eighteen and a half millions would be required for the residue of the present year. A few weeks afterwards, the Secretary *ad interim* informed us that a mistake had been discovered in the annual report, by which the means of the Treasury were estimated at near seven millions of dollars less than the true amount, and that they then had means to the amount of near seven millions beyond the amount stated in the report. Upon this important discovery, he recommended that the loan before requested should be reduced to twelve millions. But scarcely had the report containing this information been printed, when we were again informed by the Secretary, that the previous estimates were erroneous, and that it was now found necessary to raise the loan to sixteen millions. Was ever such a series of blunders and errors before witnessed? I venture the prediction, that, before this session of Congress closes, we shall be called upon to authorize additional loans, notwithstanding the assurances of the President to the contrary. The loan now asked for will be found insufficient to meet the extraordinary expenditures we are incurring.

But, Mr. Speaker, taking the estimates of the President and his Secretary as correct, with the exception of an allowance for errors in the estimates for this and the next year, equal to that which the report shows to have existed in the estimates for the last year, and our public debt on the 30th of June, 1849, will be over one hundred and three millions of dollars, upon which we shall have to pay an annual interest of \$6,183,448.26. It becomes a matter of grave interest to inquire how this debt is to be paid. From what source are the funds to be raised annually to meet the large amount of interest? I should be extremely happy to hear some gentleman, who understands and approves the financiering of this Administration, explain to us how the heavy obligations we are incurring are to be met and cancelled.

The loan bill of the last session of Congress pledges the proceeds of the public lands for the payment of the interest and the redemption of the principal of the public debt. Does any gentleman suppose that we can avail ourselves of anything from that source to meet the accruing interest for several years? A slight examination of the subject must dissipate all such hopes. Before the war commenced—when the country was on the peace establishment, and when its commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural interests, were all prosperous, only between two and three millions a year were received from the public lands. If the receipts should continue as large after the war as they were before, can we expect to pay an interest amounting to six millions of dollars from this source? But let me inquire, what revenue are we likely to derive from the public lands hereafter? The last Congress, after pledging the proceeds of the public lands to the redemption of the public debt, voted away sixteen millions of acres as a bounty to the soldiers engaged in the war. I make no objection to the bounty thus granted. It received my approbation and my vote. I was entirely willing to accord to the brave men who perilled their lives in this war, and to the families of those who perished in its prosecution, the bounty which they merited. But I do object seriously to the conduct of that Congress in providing no other means to meet the payment of the debt they were creating. I protest against this mode of deluding the country into the belief that a fund has been provided to meet the interest on the public debt, when that fund is already dissipated, and can amount to nothing. The number of claims for bounty land, which will exist under the act of the last Congress, if the additional forces now asked for by the Executive shall be called into the field, will not be short of one hundred thousand. These will draw sixteen millions of acres of land, which, at the minimum price of the Government, will amount to twenty millions of dollars. Assuming that the sales of public lands will reach three millions of dollars a year, it will require nearly seven years to absorb these warrants, and during that period our revenue from that source must be almost entirely cut off.

How, then, I would ask again, are we to meet this rapidly accumulating interest? There is but one way in my opinion; and that is, by a resort to direct taxation; and to this we are rapidly approximating. If this war is to be continued, direct taxation cannot be avoided. We have already reached a crisis which appeals strongly to the patriotism of those who brought the war upon the country—those who stand by the Administration, and defend its policy and its measures—to assume the responsibility which their own measures have created, and impose upon the people the burdens necessary to meet the enormous expenditures which the prosecution of the war requires. Do gentlemen suppose that a war can be continued year after year, with no other object than to gratify the ambitious designs of our rulers, upon credit and loans alone, without providing the means of meeting even the interest of the debt thus created? And if it could be, is it just, is it honest, or honorable, to impose upon the generation to succeed us, a heavy amount of public debt, while we meanly shrink from taxing ourselves? If we create a national debt, we ought to provide the means of its extinguishment. This has always been regarded as of the utmost importance to the credit of a nation. I will beg leave to call the attention of the House to a short extract from the first report of the Secretary of the Treasury, under the administration of Washington, in which this principle is recommended and enforced:

"Incorporating as a fundamental maxim in the system of public credit of the United States, that the creation of debt should always be accompanied with the means of extinguishment; that this is the true secret for rendering public credit immortal; and that it is difficult to conceive a situation in which there may not be an adherence to the maxim."

The principle here laid down is one which should never be lost sight of. If

this war shall be continued, and the credit of the Government shall be alone looked to to raise the means necessary to its prosecution, it requires no prophet to foretell, that the stocks of the Government will be hawked through the money marts of the country at a depreciation, while purchasers will be extremely difficult to find.

I have thus attempted, Mr. Speaker, to show what will be the probable amount of our public debt at the end of the next fiscal year. The amount at which I have placed it I am sensible is low, and I believe greatly below what it will be. But if it shall be no more, it is sufficiently large to call the serious attention of the country to the subject. It will fall but little, if any, short of the highest point of our public debt at any time since the adoption of the Constitution. The public debt on the 30th September, 1815, after the close of the late war with Great Britain, was \$119,635,558.46. This was the largest amount our public debt has ever reached. Of this sum, the debt created by the late war with Great Britain was \$80,500,073.50. The residue was the debt existing before the commencement of the war.

Gentlemen on the other side of the House seem to be fond of comparing the Mexican war to the war of 1812. There is at least one striking difference between the course pursued by the friends and supporters of the two wars. The friends of the last war, in Congress, were willing to meet the crisis like men. They did not rely upon public credit alone to raise the means to prosecute it, but appealed to their constituents to pay the taxes necessary for that purpose. In the first year of the war they doubled the duties on foreign imports; while the supporters of the Mexican war have, since its commencement, reduced them nearly one half. They also passed a law, immediately after the war was declared, to raise one million seven hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars by internal duties, and three millions by direct taxes among the States. If these measures were necessary then, they are doubly so now, when the expenses of the Government are so far greater than they were then.

Those who have not directed their attention to this subject will be astonished at the vast amount of the expenses of this war, when compared with those of the war of 1812. Let me compare them. The expenses of the Government from the 31st December, 1811, to the same date in 1812, were \$17,829,498.70. From the 31st December, 1812, to the same day of 1813, the expenses were \$28,082,396.92. From 31st December, 1813, to the same day of 1814, they were \$30,127,686.38. This statement embraces the entire expenditures of the Government for those periods, including both the war expenses and the civil list. Thus, it appears, that the entire expenses of the Government for a period of three years, embracing the whole period of the late war with Great Britain, were \$76,039,582.20. Now, let us compare this amount with the expenditures for an equal period of the Mexican war. The expenditures from the 30th June, 1846, to 30th June, 1847, as shown by the Secretary's report, were \$59,451,177.65. For the year from the 30th June, 1847, to 30th June, 1848, they are estimated by the Secretary at \$58,615,660.07. And for the year ending 30th June, 1849, they are estimated at \$55,644,941.72. Making an aggregate for the three years of \$173,711,779.44; being an excess of \$97,672,197.44 over the expenditures of the three years embracing the whole period of the late war. This comparison is made upon the estimates of the Secretary, of the expenses of two out of the three years. And yet, upon his own showing, the expenses will now exceed, by nearly one hundred millions, those of the previous period.

I wish, however, to recur again to the estimates of the expenditures for the present and the next fiscal year. The Secretary estimates the expenditures for the present year at less than those of the last, and the expenditures of the next year at less than those of the present. The expenditures for the year

ending 30th June, 1847—the first year of the war—were about fifty-nine millions and a half, and they are estimated for the present year at about fifty-eight millions and a half, and for the next year at about fifty-five and a half millions. The Secretary thus informs us that the war will cost less by a million this year than it cost the last, and that next year it will cost about five millions less. Can such estimates as these command any confidence? Can any man of ordinary intelligence believe, that as the war progresses its expenses will be diminished? The reverse of this must be the case. Each year that the war continues its expenses will increase. Such was the case during the late war. The expenses of the second year were higher than those of the first, and of the third year they were still higher. Time will prove that it will be so with the Mexican war. I should be glad to be informed upon what data the Secretary has made this estimate of diminished expenditures. Are we to have fewer men in the field than we had last year? The President tells us the number must be largely increased. Has the pay of the army been reduced? Have the rations of the officers or troops been diminished? Have any of the requisites belonging to any branch of the service been curtailed? Has any thing been done to curtail or diminish any of the expenses of the war? Nothing—absolutely nothing; and yet, according to the reasoning of the President and his Secretary, we may go on to raise new armies, and all the while the expenses will be diminished. The President insists that we shall authorize him to call into the field thirty thousand more troops, while at the same time he assures us that the expenses of the war will be diminished. Was any thing ever more absurd? And yet this is the kind of financiering which has characterized this Mexican war. From its very commencement the country has been deceived and deluded by false estimates. A constant and studied effort has been made to conceal from the people the enormous expense it occasions. A national debt has been steadily and stealthily growing upon the country, while by false estimates of the amount of loans necessary for the prosecution of the war, the country has been deceived as to the amount it was likely to reach.

The actual expense of the war is far beyond the amount of expenditures specified in the reports from the Treasury Department. Those reports present us only with a statement of the money actually paid out. We have no means of ascertaining the amount of unliquidated claims against the Government for arrearages of pay, munitions of war, wagons, horses, mules, provisions, and all the long train of supplies which an army requires, and which must all be paid for ultimately. These would constitute an item of many millions of dollars. In addition to this a very heavy item of expense is to be found in the use of the *materiel* of war with which our arsenals were filled. Before the commencement of the war these were well stored with all the munitions of war—with every variety of cannon and small arms, and every thing requisite for offensive and defensive warfare—the accumulations of thirty years of peace. All this being property owned by the Government, has been used, but does not appear in any statement of the expenditures. The amount of property thus used cannot amount to less than five millions of dollars, and in all probability to a much larger sum. Then we have the claims for bounty lands, which, as I have before stated, if the troops now asked for, shall be called out, will amount to twenty millions of dollars; and, with those heretofore called out, will not be less than fourteen millions. In addition to this will be the pension list of wounded and disabled soldiers, and the families of those who have died in the service, amounting to several millions a year, and to continue for at least twenty years. If a treaty of peace were now made, and our armies disbanded as soon as it will be possible to disband them, the actual cost of the war to the country would largely exceed one hundred millions of dollars.

But, Mr. Speaker, I desire to look for a moment at the prospective condition of the country when the war shall be brought to a close, if we shall ever be so fortunate as to reach that period. If we shall reach the end of the war by the close of the next fiscal year, we shall then, as I think I have clearly shown, have a public debt of over one hundred millions of dollars, with an annual interest of over six millions. I would again ask, how are we to meet this?

The gentleman from North Carolina, (Mr. McKAY,) whose services for several years as Chairman of the Committee of Ways and Means may give to his opinions additional weight, stated to the House a few days ago, that after the war shall be ended the revenues of the Government will be sufficient to pay its expenses, and the interest upon the public debt, without additional taxation. Is that opinion correct? Let us look at a few facts, calculated to throw light upon this subject. The entire receipts of the Government for the year ending 30th June, 1846—being the last year before the war—were \$29,499,247.06. That amount was raised thus: from customs, \$26,712,667.87; from public lands, \$2,694,452.48; and miscellaneous, \$92,126.71. The expenditures for the same year, were \$28,031,114.20. This was the amount of the expenditures for a peace establishment, (for although the war was commenced a few weeks before the close of that fiscal year, the war expenses are brought into the accounts of the next year,) and when this *Democratic Administration* was carrying out its professions of reform and retrenchment. And yet the entire receipts of the Government exceeded its expenditures only by the sum of \$1,418,132.86. If the receipts exceeded the expenditures then by only that small sum, how can we expect them, after the war shall be closed, to meet the expenses of the Government, and pay in addition six millions of interest? Does the gentleman from North Carolina suppose that the expenditures of the Government will be less after the war than they were before? He surely has too much sagacity to entertain such an opinion. The gentleman surely must know that our expenses will be much greater after the war than they were before. Can any one tell how long it will require to get rid of our large army, or to reduce it to the numbers it filled before the war? Sir, no member of this House will live to see it reduced to the standard it occupied before the war commenced. Let this war end when and how it may, we are doomed to have a large military force fastened upon the country. The expenses of the Government must be greatly increased. But let us see how the account stands for the next year. The entire revenues for the year ending 30th June, 1847, were \$26,346,790.37. The expenditures for the same period, were \$59,451,177.65. Of this amount there is charged in the Secretary's report to "Mexican hostilities," \$18,365,518.03; for pay to volunteers and militia, \$1,368,709.40; for the redemption of loan and treasury notes, \$2,402,817.65; which leaves for other expenses, \$37,314,123.57, being an excess over the revenue of \$10,967,333.20.

[Mr. McKAY inquired from what source the gentleman from Indiana obtained his statistics?]

Mr. SMITH replied that he took them as he found them in the report of the Secretary of the Treasury.

Here, then, said Mr. SMITH, is an excess of expenditure in one year, over the revenues, of nearly eleven millions of dollars. Upon what ground, then, can any gentleman believe that, after the war shall end, we can meet the expenses of the Government, and pay over six millions of interest, without additional taxation? It will be impossible, after the war shall be terminated, to reduce the expenses of the Government below thirty-five millions of dollars. Add to this, six millions for interest on the public debt, and we have forty-one millions of dollars to be provided for. How is it to be met? Can we expect to realize this amount from duties on foreign goods? Deprived, as we shall be,

of any considerable revenue from the public lands for many years, I do not believe that we shall be able to realize, from all sources of revenue, without additional taxation, at the utmost over thirty millions of dollars, leaving eleven millions unprovided for. Can we expect the credit or character of the Government to be sustained under such a system of financiering as this? The Treasury notes and bonds of the Government are at this time selling at prices below par in our commercial cities. The quotations have been constantly below par since the commencement of the present session of Congress.

But, Mr. Speaker, I will not trouble the House with any further display of figures. Those which I have already presented, I think, are sufficient to show that our financial condition is in an eminent degree embarrassing from the operations and effects of the Mexican war. The rapid increase of our public debt is well calculated to excite serious alarm. The subject demands our most serious attention. We may well take warning from the example of other nations. The tax-ridden subjects of the government of Great Britain are now paying the penalty of the folly and ambition of their rulers. The public debt of Great Britain is now over eight hundred millions pounds sterling, being more than four thousand millions of dollars. In order to meet the interest on this heavy amount of debt, (although the rate of interest paid is but little more than half the rate we are paying,) the government is compelled to resort to an amount of taxation which is absolutely ruinous to the laboring interests of the country. The whole of this vast debt has been created within a century and a half. The financial expedients by which governments have obtained money upon the national credit, for the prosecution of wars, are of modern origin. In the earlier periods of history, the governments of Europe raised the means from year to year for the payment of the expenses of the wars in which they engaged. The generation which prosecuted a war defrayed its expenses. It was not left as a burden to clog the energies and oppress the industry of a subsequent generation.

The first loan obtained upon the credit of the government of Great Britain was in 1689, under the reign of Charles II. Since then it has been accumulating with every new war in which the ambition or the cupidity of the government involved the country, until it has reached its present enormous amount. Great Britain has extended her conquests into every quarter of the globe. Province after province has been "annexed" to her dominions, until her flag is seen in every clime. The splendor and power of her government has been increased, but it has been at the expense of the happiness of her people. Strike out of existence her national debt, and her subjects would be relieved of half their burdens. We should beware lest, while we imitate her example in extending our conquests, and annexing additional territory, we may be bringing upon ourselves and our children the evils under which she is now suffering.

The easy payment of the national debt after the late war, has induced the belief with some that no danger is to be apprehended from that source; and that no matter how great a public debt we may create, we can easily discharge it. Gentlemen who entertain this opinion should look at the fact that our Government was then cheaply and economically administered. Its entire annual expenditures were only twelve or thirteen millions of dollars, while now they are between thirty and forty millions, aside from the war expenses. The interest upon the debt we are creating must swell them even beyond this. Our expenses increase in a more rapid ratio than our resources. I fear, sir, that we are rapidly approximating the period when direct taxation will be found indispensable.

The friends of the Administration tell us that the Mexican war is popular, and that the people desire its prosecution. If they believe this, why do they not deal fairly and candidly with the people? Why do they not tell them, if the

war is to be continued, the people must pay at least a portion of its expenses? Why do they not appeal to them to contribute a portion of their means to sustain the credit of the Government, and enable it to obtain the means necessary for the "vigorous prosecution of the war?" Sir, they know well that the boasted popularity of this war would not survive the first visit of the tax collector. I know, sir, that the patriotism of the people is sufficient to induce them to submit to any sacrifice necessary to sustain the honor of the country. Let but a foreign foe be found upon our soil, and any amount of taxation would be cheerfully paid which would be necessary to repel him. But I do not believe that the American people desire to contribute their means, or sacrifice the fair fame of the country, for the prosecution of an aggressive war, in a foreign land, with the object of conquest—to acquire territory to which we have no right, which we do not need, and which could be of no possible benefit to us if we should obtain it. If the course I have indicated shall not be pursued, I fear we shall soon see the credit of the Government seriously impaired, and a deficiency of means to carry on its ordinary operations. But I will say no more on this subject. There are other matters to which I wish to direct my attention in what remains of my time.

It would afford me very great pleasure to hear some friend of the Administration—some advocate of the war—define clearly and precisely for what object it is to be further prosecuted. I should be glad if the President, or any of his friends, would point out clearly the line of operations it is intended to pursue. We have heard a great deal said about the necessity of prosecuting the war vigorously, to obtain an "*honorable peace*." All certainly desire an honorable peace; but when gentlemen urge the prosecution of the war for that object, why do they not inform us what they mean by an "*honorable peace*?" Do they consider no peace "*honorable*" but one which will destroy the nationality of Mexico? Must a peace, to be "*honorable*" in their estimation, require the surrender by Mexico of half her territory?

There is another phrase very frequently used as indicative of the designs of the Administration. It is "*indemnity for the past, and security for the future*," and is about as unmeaning and unsatisfactory to explain the object of the war, as the "*honorable peace*," so frequently referred to. It was first used in the President's message, and has since become the common watchword of his friends. Ask them what is the object of the war, and they are ever ready with the reply, "*indemnity for the past, and security for the future*." Perhaps we can understand what is meant by "*indemnity for the past*." But what is meant by this cabalistic phrase, "*security for the future*?" Is security for the future to be found in the possession of all Mexico? Are we to provide against a breach of the peace by the "*annexation*" of the whole country? Are we to keep the country quiet by the continued presence of a large military force? Or are we to adopt the policy which, from the intimations in the President's message, would seem to be one that meets his approbation, that of placing in power, in Mexico, an administration of our own choice, with which we can make a treaty on our own terms, and then, by the presence of our armies, compel the people of Mexico to render obedience to the government which we thus force upon them? Are our rulers already so wild and reckless as to attempt to carry out such a policy? The policy is not a new one. The scheme was tried by Napoleon Bonaparte, in Spain, when he overran the country with his armies, and placed his brother on the throne. While we imitate his conduct, we should profit by his example, and take warning by his fate. If we undertake to carry out this system, we must expect to keep an army of fifty thousand men there for at least twenty years.

The course of the President, in the prosecution of this war, has not been such as should characterize the Executive of a free government. Instead of

frankness and candor as to the designs of the Administration, we have witnessed continual efforts at concealment. Instead of precise and definite statements as to the object to be attained, we are met with high-sounding, general, and oracular phrases, as unmeaning and indefinite as the Delphic responses. We have been told by the President, while the same lesson has been frequently repeated to us by his friends, that we should not discuss the origin or objects of the war, because, by doing so we may give "*aid and comfort to the enemy.*" The paid organ of the Administration pours out its daily round of abuse of Congress, for not voting at once, without delay and without debate, all the means for prosecuting the war which the President desires. We have called upon the President, by a resolution of the House, to inform us what were the terms upon which he authorized Mr. Slidell to negotiate with Mexico. He refuses to give us the information, and tells us, in effect, that we have no right to ask him such questions.

Shall we, then, in obedience to his wishes, in ignorance of his designs, which are so studiously concealed from the country, submit to him the continued prosecution of the war, as long as he may desire to prosecute it, and vote to raise new armies as often as he may desire them? If such is our duty, I have mistaken the character of our Government.

Very shortly after the commencement of the war I expressed my opinion on this floor of its origin and its objects. I stated then, that the war was commenced for purposes of conquest, and that it would not be suffered to end until those objects were accomplished. Nearly two years have elapsed since then, and the events of the intervening period have only confirmed my opinions. Notwithstanding the repeated assurances of the President and his friends, that the war was not continued with any design of conquest, and that it should be terminated as soon as Mexico would agree to pay the indemnity due to us, he has himself shown in his late message that such assurances are entitled to no credit.

Mr. Trist was sent to Mexico last summer as a commissioner, with powers to negotiate a treaty of peace. I will read a short extract from the President's message of December last, to show what were his instructions. The President says:

"The boundary of the Rio Grande, and the cession to the United States of New Mexico and Upper California, constituted an ultimatum which our commissioner was under no circumstances to yield."

We are thus informed by the President that he determined to prosecute the war for the acquisition of New Mexico and Upper California—at least one-third of the whole Mexican territory. His language is direct and explicit, and liable to no misconstruction. I will read, now, an extract from his annual message of December, 1846, to show what were the views he then expressed of the objects for which the war should be further prosecuted:

"The war has not been waged with a view to conquest; but, having been commenced by Mexico, it has been carried into the enemy's country, and will be vigorously prosecuted there, with a view to obtain an honorable peace, and thereby secure ample indemnity for the expenses of the war, as well as to our much injured citizens, who hold large pecuniary demands against Mexico."

He disavowed, then, any design of conquest, and defined the terms of the "honorable peace" which it was his object to obtain, as indemnity for the expenses of the war and the claims due to our citizens. Does he show, now, that he was willing to make such a peace as he had himself said would be "honorable?" If his professions of a desire for peace, and his disavowal of a design of conquest, made last year, were sincere, he would have authorized Mr. Trist, his commissioner, to have made a treaty of peace whenever Mexico would agree to give the indemnity which he himself specified, as being all we had any right to demand. But did he give Mr. Trist such authority? He instructed him to make no peace with Mexico unless she would agree to "*the*

boundary of the Rio Grande, and the cession to the United States of New Mexico and Upper California." Had we any right to demand of Mexico the cession of New Mexico and California? Did the President believe that we had any such right? The President knew well that we had no such right. He has himself informed us that those provinces were estimated to be of a greater value than the amount of all the claims which he supposed we had against Mexico, even including the expenses of the war. Let me read another short extract from his last message, to show what are his opinions on this point. He says:

"As the territory to be acquired by the boundary proposed might be estimated to be of greater value than a fair equivalent for our just demands, our commissioner was authorized to stipulate for the payment of such additional pecuniary consideration as was deemed reasonable."

He does not now authorize Mr. Trist to make peace when Mexico will pay all that he believes to be our just demands, including all the expenses of the war. But he insists that we shall continue the war until Mexico cedes to us territory which he admits is "*of greater value than a fair equivalent for our just demands.*"

What was the amount of the "*pecuniary consideration*;" which Mr. Trist was authorized to stipulate for, the President does not inform us. In the correspondence between the Mexican commissioners and Mr. Trist, it is stated at twenty millions of dollars. It is very probable that that was the amount he was authorized to offer.

In the propositions for peace which were made by the Mexican commissioners, a large amount of territory was offered, but it was rejected under the instructions of the President. Nothing less than the boundary of the Rio Grande, and the whole of New Mexico and California, would be received, although the President admits we have no just claim to them. And yet, he says, he entertains no design of conquest. Is it no conquest to take from Mexico her territory by force, when at the same time we admit we have no right to it? Does the offer of a "*pecuniary consideration*" change the character of the transaction, or render it any less a conquest? We keep our armies within her territory, we sack her towns and bombard her cities, we slay thousands of her citizens, we make war upon her in every conceivable shape, we tell her that this shall be continued until she cedes to us one-third of all her territory, although at the same time we admit that it is much more than all our just demands; and yet the President, while doing all this, gravely informs the country that he entertains no design of conquest. This is what he denominates prosecuting the war for indemnity.

But, Mr. Speaker, I fear the designs of conquest which are seriously entertained are not limited to New Mexico and Upper California. The idea of incorporating the whole of Mexico into the American Union is more than hinted at from high quarters among the supporters of the Administration. Such a design will not be openly avowed, particularly before the Presidential election, lest the people shall take the alarm, and adopt effectual means to prevent the consummation of so fatal a measure. I have before me a speech, made but a few days since in the other end of the Capitol, by a gentleman who stands upon confidential terms with the Administration. I will read an extract from it. He says:

"There are numerous cases, all tending to the same point, that whenever it becomes impracticable to obtain territory by purchase, we TAKE IT BY FORCE. All that strip of country lying between Natchez and Baton Rouge was taken possession of in that way. And we have done so in all cases when we could not obtain territory by negotiation; and this course has been pursued throughout the world, in all times, by all Powers."

This is from a speech made by the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations in the Senate, (Mr. SEVIER,) delivered on the 24th January last. The honorable Chairman here openly avows the intention to take the territory of Mexico by force, and justifies it upon the ground that such has been the practice throughout the world.

I will also read an extract from another speech, made in the same body during the present session of Congress:

"I repeat, what I before said, that the longer Mexico continues her obstinate rejection of reasonable indemnity, and the greater exertion she compels us to make, the greater will be our demands, and the heavier her losses. What we would have accepted last year, or even at the commencement of the present campaign, we may well refuse now; and what we would accept now, we may well refuse after a few months. And how much the public sentiment of this country may demand a year or two hence, if the war continues so long, I do not pretend to predict. We may have to make the great experiment so dreaded by the Senator from South Carolina, and the Senator from Kentucky, and annex the domains of Mexico to our own. This is the penalty which national injustice has often been compelled to pay, and which Mexico may be preparing for herself."

This extract is from the speech of a gentleman (Mr. CASS) who it is generally believed will be the candidate of the Democratic party for the Presidency. The policy here marked out may be regarded as the foreshadowing of the course to be pursued in the event of his election. The indemnity to be demanded from Mexico is to be increased in proportion to her obstinacy. What would have satisfied us a few months ago, must not satisfy us now. The longer we protract the war, the more of her provinces must we take. With every additional month our demands must be increased, until we reach the point of annexing the entire country.

[A gentleman sitting near Mr. SMITH remarked, in an under tone, "that is progressive Democracy."]

Yes, said Mr. S., it is "progressive Democracy," with a vengeance. Democracy is indeed progressing at a fearful rate. When the annexation of Texas was first proposed, Democracy shrunk back affrighted. Now it contemplates, with complacency, the conquest and annexation of a country with nine millions of inhabitants.

Can any one doubt, from the evidences before us, that we are rapidly hastening to that "great experiment" to which Mr. CASS refers? The object will not be openly avowed; the country will still be deluded with the hopes of peace until after the Presidential election; and then, should the Democracy elect their candidate, the mask will be thrown aside, and the annexation of Mexico openly advocated. Then, that "public sentiment," to which General CASS refers, will be invoked in aid of the measure.

I do not believe that the Administration has any desire to negotiate a peace with Mexico. I have no expectation that any treaty will be made before the Presidential election. For several days the city has been filled with rumors of a treaty negotiated by Mr. Trist. The letter writers from this city have filled the press with statements of the prospect of successful negotiations. The pleasure every where manifested by the public at these rumors—the avidity with which they are caught up and repeated all over the country—proves the anxiety for peace which exists with the people. With people of all political parties, the same ardent wishes for the termination of the war are expressed. But the hopes excited by these rumors are doomed to disappointment. Ever since the commencement of the war, the cry of peace has been raised. After each successive victory won by our armies, the same syren song has been sung, the same dulcet notes have been sounded, but yet peace came not. There has been a continual cry of "peace, peace, when there was no peace."

The President's organ, since the rumors of Mr. Trist's negotiations have been so rife, has stated, explicitly, that all such rumors are without foundation. It is well understood here that, notwithstanding Mr. Trist's powers to negotiate have been revoked, the Mexican authorities have made propositions to negotiate with him; that they are anxious for peace, and would be willing to obtain it even at the price of the territory which the President says he authorized Mr. Trist to receive. It is apparent, however, that the Administration has no desire to make peace, even upon those terms. The most violent abuse has been visited upon Mr. Trist, by his own party friends,

for remaining in Mexico, or for suffering anything to be said to him about peace by the Mexican authorities. It is said, also, upon the authority of various sources of information, that Gen. Scott is ardently favorable to peace, and anxious to promote it with all the influence of his name and position. This may, perhaps, in some measure, account for the hostility of the Administration towards him. I should be glad to ascertain what connection there may be between this and the late extraordinary movement of the Administration, in removing him from the command of the army, and subjecting him to a trial before a board of inferior officers. The truth is, the Administration neither expects nor desires peace. Any hopes of an early peace which may be entertained by the people will be disappointed. The *ignis fatuus* of peace, so constantly held up before them, will still elude their grasp. No peace need be expected, unless the people shall express their desire for it, in such terms as will compel the Administration to abandon their designs of conquest.

If the Administration really and sincerely desired peace, it would be an easy task to obtain it. I believe that peace, an "honorable peace," may be obtained in sixty days—a peace just to Mexico and honorable to ourselves—a peace which would testify to the world our magnanimity and sense of justice, as our brilliant victories have already shown our heroic courage and skill in war. Let the President appoint commissioners—not one of the clerks of a Department—but men of high standing and character, no matter to what political party they may belong—men known to the country, and whose character as statesmen would furnish a guaranty of the upright and honorable intentions of the Government. Let the Administration renounce its wild schemes of conquest, and through such men as these propose terms of peace, just and honorable, and, my word for it, we shall have peace at once. Let us demand from Mexico all that we have a right, in truth and justice, to demand, and nothing more. Let us not insist on the cession of territory which the President himself tells us is more than "our just demands." Let us not insist on demands which our own Government admits are unjust.

Mr. SAWYER here interposed, and asked Mr. SMITH what were the terms we ought to offer.

Mr. SMITH replied, it is for those who have the control of the Government to propose the terms. The Administration should inform the country explicitly upon what terms it is willing to make peace. I have already stated, in general terms, what propositions we should make. I repudiate entirely the pretence set up, that we should demand of Mexico the expenses of the war. The House has decided that the war was "unnecessarily and unconstitutionally" commenced. If this be true, upon what pretext can we claim that Mexico should pay the expenses of its prosecution? This higgling with Mexico for the cost of the powder burnt in bombarding her cities is disreputable to the nation. What were our claims before the war begun? We insisted upon having Texas, with such boundaries as she was fairly entitled to. Mexico was indebted to us, by treaty, some two millions of dollars. Besides this, there were unliquidated claims for spoliations, the precise amount of which has never been ascertained. These constituted all our claims before the war. We set up no claim then to any of the territory of Mexico beyond Texas. All we then asked was that Mexico should acquiesce in the annexation of Texas, settle and define her boundary, and pay the claims which we held against her. Has the existence of the war increased our just demands? If the war was commenced as we have decided, by an aggressive movement of the President, it is very clear that it has not. Our rights now are no greater than they were before the war began.

If, however, the Administration intends to hold and retain permanently New Mexico and California—acknowledging at the same time that they constitute a larger measure of indemnity than we have any just right to demand—

why not hold those provinces, and withdraw our forces from the other portions of Mexico? Why shall we keep an army of fifty thousand men in the heart of Mexico, preying upon the vitals of the country, when with ten thousand men we can hold all that the Administration pretends it wishes to retain? Five thousand troops in New Mexico, and an equal number in Upper California, would hold those provinces against all the force which Mexico can bring into the field.

There must be ulterior designs beyond the mere acquisition of those provinces. If that, in truth, is all that the Administration desires or intends to acquire, there is wisdom and sound policy in the course marked out by the distinguished Senator from South Carolina, (Mr. CALHOUN.) By adopting that policy, three-fourths of the immense expense we are now incurring might be avoided, and the further effusion of blood might be stayed.

I fear there is but one remedy for these evils, and that is in the hands of the people. The people must place the power of the Government in the hands of men of different principles. The time is approaching when they will have the opportunity of applying this remedy, and I trust it will be applied.

I am forced to the belief, Mr. Speaker, that the whole policy of the Administration, as connected with the war, has been characterized by a want of sincerity and fair dealing towards the country. Had the design to bring on this war been known or avowed, it would have been prevented. But amid continued professions of a desire for peace, and the avoidance of causes of hostility, the war was stealthily brought on, while the country was carefully kept in ignorance of the danger of hostilities, until the blaze of the battle-fields in Mexico exposed to us the fact that war existed. Had the last Congress, with its strong Democratic majority, resorted to the means of raising revenue for its prosecution, which the exigency demanded, the boasted popularity of the war would before this time have vanished.

It was my fortune to have a seat on this floor at the time Texas was annexed. I opposed this measure, believing that it would be the source of evils of great magnitude. Those who urged it upon us assured us that it would not produce war, and at the session of Congress after its annexation, the President congratulated the country that it was a bloodless achievement. The very same gentlemen, who then assured us that the annexation of Texas would not produce war, now attempt to defend the President from the charge that he commenced the war, by the assertion that the annexation of Texas produced the war. The position assumed now is not very consistent with the one assumed then.

But we have Texas, and there let us stop. If we can succeed in wringing from the distress and suffering of Mexico, a cession of more of her territory, every foot which we thus acquire will prove a curse and a calamity to us. It is a great mistake to suppose that by the extension of our territory we shall increase our power or our greatness; more especially when that extension is effected by force and violence. History furnishes no single instance of a nation deriving benefit or advantage from an extension of its dominion by force and conquest. We cannot form an exception to the rule.

I believe, Mr. Speaker, we are approaching a crisis which is to be decisive of the fate of our Government. We cannot shut our eyes to the alarming dangers of the career of conquest upon which we have entered. If it shall not be arrested, it must be fatal to our Union. The denationalization of Mexico, and its annexation to this Republic, would be destructive of our Government. Whoever may live to see that event, will, in all probability, survive the glorious Union of these United States.